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Roving Along

AN INDIAN INTERLUDE

Omar Abou-Richeh

Authorized
English translations from the original Arabic

Copyright

Z . BAALBAKI
ALMAKTAB ALTIJARI
BEIRUT - LEBANON

*

*The author is grateful to his
Indian friends, and in particular
to Professor Lajpat Rai
for encouragement throughout
to come forth as this sheaf of
plays and poems.*

TO
MUNIRA

*‘Tween birth and death
there’s space enough
to leave one trail behind.*

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ROVING ALONG

*E'er more sublime
than Beauty's forms
Poet's love for Beauty is.*

EVEREST

UP,
up — beyond I' Azure's ethereal range of Blue,
a token mute of Earth's first Passion's-urge
— pervading all her being — oh
there you stand !

A warm night 'twas —
a little devil of a star of love had soft be'-winked,
and — brisk
an Arm up Skyward-stretching rose and stood
— a mood !
And — changeless, e'er since, still oh there it stands ;
O My..., you stand —
the pictured bliss
of an embrace unfulfilled, unscanned !

THE STRENGTH TO LIVE AND DIE

This struggle resolves itself into an incessant crucifixion of the flesh so that the spirit may become entirely free. —Gandhiji

THE prayers of wounds,
The songs of Pain,
The smiles of tears,
The visions of Hope :
And there, behold, you stirred to life !

*

Long, and arduous, was the road
For the Pilgrim's realization
Of Man's empyrean realms of Gold —
Of values human-bold.

A Staff, in hand — a 'wooden' staff
that tempered canons' iron soft —
A Pilgrim Father how you marched ahead !
O Strength unfathomed hid in Frailty's beds !

O Pow'r unseen —
that charmed Reptiles
and conjuring tamed ferocious Beasts,
And from their woeful, vicious, snares released
the caravans writhing, struggling, o'er the mile — !

O Morning-bird of Peace and Love,
O, wake up, sing,
And with your firsts of hymnals stir up, ring
Mind's sleeping, dumb'd, alcoves.

*

This matin chirp of yours
'Tis Truth's calm glow
Unfailing burns 'mid storms' rough ceaseless blows :
A deathless flickering Flame !

*

Wish I were a tiny drop of oil *incensed*
In one of those galactic earthen lamps
Strewn round your humble shrines — at peace !

AND THE MIRROR TOO

YON Cliffs and Skies,
Oh, why they shy
From my embrace ?
Why stumble I at every pace
Here at their feet below ?

Have pebbles *grown*
To leave me lone
'Fore paths *now* lost ? —
My playfields seem receding fast —
From Eagle's reach slipped, lo !

Why all this change ?

...

And why this Wine
— A drink divine —
Doth not inflame,
Enthuse, my wings to worlds (for claim)
Of bliss — where's wish no more !

Have clouds distilled
— In passing killed —
Its fragrance, flame ? —
My cup it tasteth vapid, tame,
Inspiring *ah* ne'ermore !
— *Past* thought's far-range.

...

This Winter — who
Was lover true —
How oft he came
To my doors — e'er to find *me* same :
With arms agog to greet !

... How oft I felt
His chilled breath melt
At my warm touch —
In drops — still cherish I how much,
O longer days unsweet !

Ah — passing strange !

...

‘Come, forget all,’
I hear a call ; ...
Perfumes in hand,
My mirror, lo, I facing stand
— A wish yet undefined.

O Cruelty ! —
What’s there I see ?

My Mirror, O my Mirror, friend,
Companion old, *is this the end ?*
Ne’er could I think thy friendly face —
Would also change.

WHEREFORE

WHEREFORE, O poet, thy self consume ?

*

Is it — by Love inspired — thy Muse
In songs of Beauty's passing views
Doth herself lose ?

Is it for lifelong Glory's sake
Her ravenous wolves feedst thou — awake —
In fond dreams' wake ?

Is it — in Name to live, abide ?
Well — caravans may come, see, deride
One's life's-work, pride !

Is it — by Senses led astray —
Thy Art doth make, adore, then slay
Thy gods in play ?

— — —

No more by Hope be tantalized
To shades and streams by her de-vised,
O hypnotized !

Nor waste thy pearls on Desert air ;
List calm to Stars' soft, lilting, fare
These Nights thee spare—

To calm, console, and lull' thee here
Ere Morrow, ambushed, chase thee in sneer.
Beware, my dear !

*

Come, with thy spark — thy world illumine.

M I R A G E

Why despair, love ?

Our fields they still can yield.

Look there — that Desert — wilderness serene —

no tree, no bird, no life

Yet, love,

at noon — when Hell is spitting fire there —

there outflows —

of freshness, melodies, rhythms — *one* quickening Stream !

O Sand fertile !

With burning eyes and gasping breath, bored stiff,

he nods to Sleep — for dreams

And what's Mirage — but

his own *cherubic* — introspective — Art

for frolic and for balm indulged, 'brought forth' — ?

Why despair, love ?

DON'T GIVE 'T AWAY

LIFE's glory and pride,
a song besides —
of Manliness sublime ;

A world — of dreams
of maiden gleams
of Night's — soft-tickling Prime

'Neath Spring's sweet spell
where Heart, impelled,
bemused — as One — ilts, rhymes

— To heights, to depths,
— to rocks, to clefts
dis-turbed by *Rings* of Time :

'Come hither, dip
in — fill or sip
from — fonts of Bliss Divine !'

*

This *roving* Charm —
— this Mantle warm — thine —
wilt thou choose to lose

On a cow'rd unblest
— repression-prest
or diffidence-touched, O Youth — ?

TOYS

WHAT a flow'r —
to every breeze at dance !
What a Rainbow —
frozen — e'er to sheltered glow !
What a scent —
in-stored — to haunting, freshening flow !
— — — Its roots, *and yet*,
in soil deep-set,
On what they grow
— I know :
From Nature's frenzied trance.

The flower is all I see.
Speak not, fair maid, of love — of love-on-wane :
no Dawn shall fold us both again. Don't speak.
No ; no words breathe,

PHANTOMS

No ; quench not lights, for — sleep hath not
yet on mine eyes descended ;

My cup, o'erbrimmed with drink, still hot
consumes my dreams unended.

Whilst on thy limbs Love fadeless blooms
— full, what's thou longst for, love ?

'Mid lilies, bliss, dreams — thoughts of moons,
sleep ; leave me lone, my love.

Not, heaving plaintive sighs, O, glance
at but-a-young-poet's bed, —
My Rose — to whom a moth I danced —
long lies in coffin dead.
Thy heart by jealousies be not torn
each time her memory gleam :
Fair maiden,

dead are dead.

*

A mystic smile perched on her lips
— reflecting pride and grace ;
She calmly went, and picked her slips
(around me strewn), apace
She did her hair and dropped abed
and — lured with consent Sleep
— When Silence drooped and — Fancy fled and
had me in 'er grip.

.. Save breathing Dark all else was calm

— but not for long could be :

There ! — something stirred, ..approached, ..in-hemmed,
and — whelming — unnerved me.

.. .. An icy Hand's familiar-of-yore
dead' touch on brow I feel.

Was it reproach — or something more
a bit — *numbs* me to kneel — ?

*

Dawn breathed me forth a fresh page, writ
by Pain avenged to o'ernight —
That jilted, broken, hearts be lit
by Consolation's light.

But, how can Past — Past's shades — be 'gone
(however spent wine's steam) ?

Did I say —

dead were dead ? .. ?

.. Did I ?

W O M A N

My love, forget —
that cheerless, chilling, tale of woes long dead.
Revive not —
memories laid to rest. Come, sans regrets,
let's start afresh.

*

To a sailor — lost his stars, his path, his oar —
In darkling Night, and Tempest's maddening roar :
To me — bewrecked, befraught — to steer ashore
— A star, a gleam, a Mercy, nay (e'enmore) —
An angel in disguise,
ye came, and lo — my hopes and songs impelled to skies !

*

See —

Spring in Garden stirs — there — Season's wish

(For twains to surge — in love's pure virgin kiss),

Come, love !

Or — wilt thou unmoved, ruthless, kill

My ardour — dreams —

with lips unopened, stilled

— Belike a dagger's seething stab (repressed, concealed) ?

My, look up, see —

my face solicitous, calm —

Of passion's fuel bereft, a beatific psalm ,

My hands pure cleansed of Stain — to be thy trust?... ..

*

An inclined head, a wistful eye betrayed —

A Dream's despair — *unsaid*.

SEA

E'er restless roll,
Ill-fated soul,
And — in thy wake —
Let no crag there on shore in peace e'er beam,
And not a sail of safety dream.
Surge, .. gush, .. break, .. roll, ..

Roar on, roar on, ...
And fret and fume;
And spit and spume,
And curse, blaspheme, . . .
Naught shall redeem;
Deathlessness shall e'er be
thy mate
— for all thy hate !

Uproarious howl
or petulant scowl, —
Exhausted thou dost fall
— in swoon — to sleep
— to only wake and start again
on Life's monotonous flow ! . . .

*

O Restlessness unblest
— Infinite, unworn, Breath,
Ne'er wilt seduce thou Death.

THE NIGHTINGALE

AN — sheltered cosy in a Cage, forlorn
The nightingale bewailed a plaint lovelorn
His Dream, a joy for ever, all forsa'en
— No sweet laments of his could now regain,

As I stood by and watched his spray of trills
(Those atomised bits of heart — *they weren't trills*),
By him his mate, as ever, a shadow unmoved
— An echo of faith and love self-giving, coved.

.. But — oft, anon — the song cut silent, bare ;
His eyes looked into space in vacant stare ;
His wings they spread them down to shade and spare
His pang from bursting forth on deaf world's air ;
His beak it smarted, closed, and *then* — twitched, pecked
At the iron-bars ease-smothered, gilt, ~~debecked~~ . . .

Those comforts of the Cage he *would* discard—
As treasures not self-earned : they only marred
His sense of values, ... visions to be free —
For joys 'mid lilies, roses, where'er be.

By Fate vindictive cruelly thus enchained,
From thrills of flesh and moment fain abstained
— He woo'd a life of Dirge — of Dirge's drains

*

A nest he ne'er would gear,
His mate he ne'er would pair, ...
Too proud : too proud—
To leave an heritage shameful, sheer,
Of Bondage for to share.

SIGIRIA

A skyscraper of rock in Ceylon

'A THING sublime — to pride —
Of Softness hatched, of Strength in-formed —
An Image-of-Grace : a Bride ! —
Defying Death, and
breathing, cooling solitude, ... Infinitude,
lo — how it stands
— up here : my home
no wings can reach :
Ambition's End ! '

— At close of day, Sigiria said,
and dropped abed.

*

Sigiria,

— a Whisper's caress breathed from Depthlessness :

This marvellous home of thine, Sigiria,

'neath the Sky —

is low, too low, and —

left alone

— 'tis built on earth, ye know ;

And — dust, .. dust, .. dust, ..

*

O dust —

than air, there, lighter, how ye weigh

on shoulders broad of stone

— O dust tenebrous, O Forgetfulness !

E G O

Ne'er nourished I a vengeance in my heart,
Nor e'er felt hurt why none — for all my Art —
My fellow traveller was.

E'er since I oped my eyes I've nowhere seen
True Greatness for to submit to, or smallness mean —
Disheartening, perverse, sheer.

Ne'er could aught touch my steadfast, dauntless, Pride ;
Nor could Sublimity e'er my ways deride
Or — me desert or shy.

*

This
by my Ego's augustness I state.

But, how long yet — a soul at home unhomed —
Shall I benighted, starless, stumbling, roam ?
O soul disconsolate !

THE EAGLE

O CLIFFS, revolt

— The Kingbird woos the plains : unbolt

— Your injured pride, ..resent in shrieks — resounding
The welkin's empty interspace surrounding !

O, cast Pride's shattered, bleeding, lifeless, corpse
At time's unsteady feet

Up : guard ye well remains there of his Nest

— In disdain strong : for, no more with old zest

To Sun-ward will he soar, to heavens fly

— To 'salve Stars' eyes with Feathers breezing by ...

... Still something in his look there was —

when, leaving home,

On forehead farewell-kissed by Clouds,

to earth he'd come.

Full many a fire there smouldering 'neath his wings,
The mean birds flee from him in scare, a-shrink.
"Don't flee, don't flee, wee things ; O, ken should ye
His state, then ne'er would flee ye : don't, don't flee.
His wings and claws enerved by Fate and Age,
This Awe is all — left of his Heritage."

I'd seen the Ea'le, ah Jove's Bird, hungry perched
On carrion — whence by vermin nudged aside, *in searched*
His own *Self* he, .. looked up, .. bestirred him high
To 'Zure — his feeble wreckage draggling by —
In rending squeals (by quarters rung through skies),
Then crashed — there in his own Nest — home — to die !

..

Kingbird,

Shall I to summits mine, like thee, *rz-soar* ?

Or — ease of plains hath stilled my pride e'er more ?

ROADS

To Dr Saniya Haboub

I STAND before the roads of Life ;
Hopes surge, and thoughts confound.
I stand, and caravans pass me by
For Destination bound ;
But, of their trails — 'neath clouds of dust,
On sands — no trace is found !

I take these roads —
broad, endless, roads
Long treks
— ah — shattering make me reel :
A wing o'ernight collapsed !

An earthed Dream's dim prints there I feel

On 'ts feathers stay, outlast !

Of nights

— whereof despite short-end —

I reaped the best of fruit,

Of nights

— in Content steeped that lent

weird bliss to me to boot :

From lips of *Life* — in sweet intent —

I sang

tunes, rhymes, to suit

Gay soirees' tastes — for good time meant — and

nights that unslept soothe.

*

O, shall a day be mine ? — a touch,

a caress, heal — efface —

one wound's, one tear's, last trace !

DESOLATE

THIS sprightly Night
In her mantle white
Hath veiled all Earth
And stilled me here
Beside my hearth.

'Mid sombre hush
My memories rush
Ignoring there
(Whilst embers sink)
That empty chair.

P R A Y E R

WHEN God had breathed,

These brooks, these shades,

these velvets soft

bespreading plains and hills and dales and glades :

for eyes — refreshing views,
for hearts — subsistence true ;
for erring souls repentance due —
the tinkling, chiming, peals and Muazzin's calls
from depths of Heart, from every Nook, inviting
— to Peace and Love's 'expectant' Home : delighting,
had come forth !

When God had breathed,
The breath was Word ;
The Word was Beauty's stir : my country's birth.

*

'Tis Eden true — *M y E d e n !*
But, couldst thou not, my God,
O, make her more enchanting still ?
O, spout forth men *instead*, just men !
Thou canst. Amen.

LA BELLE DAME PORT SA'ED

THERE'S nothing more, than honour, to be hailed
except a fight for honour, O fair Maid
of Sea : in Beauty's pride there how you lean
on the shore — detached, serene !

*

Ah — When was beauty a bliss ?
Those pirates — there on every wave — in wait —
how shameless, loud, they sang and revelled, and raved
— to thy ears, senses, shut ! . . .
.. But, no ; lo, there —
they come — in lust and hate imbued, they come !
And, still you stand — unruffled, 'un-enthused' !
a pose — a shrine for Grace !

.. The shore is red,
and there you lie ;
They stab and stab,
and you don't sigh ;
Your Will your shield,
and you don't yield,
and you don't die !

*

.. ..
In hate and shame they marched retreat.
You heard them claim :
'She hath no heart,' .. 'Oh, no —
'tis petrified,'
You smiled,
and — round a corner — Dawn unnoticed came !

ON THE NEW YEAR'S EVE

'Tis New Year's eve ;
and here I sit alone
in my room. Leave me lone.

... ..

What a company — host of Shadows — how they move, . .
and stare at me, . .and fall !
I know them all :

Those destitutes — on bleak, bleak deserts strewn —
they're human beings and, sure, they *look* alive
— *not dead* from graves dug up.

They stand and wait,
and watch with lightless, lurid, eyes
their fields and lands — in the Raider's hands —
despoiled
and soiled.

O slaughtered Palestine !

*

And there — in jails
of Inquisition — I see
old men, old women, children ag'd foretime ;
I can even hear
the lash of whips and thongs, and curse of wounds

And the Hand —
that lit the torch of Freedom *once*

D E L U G E

inspired by a film

A winter evening, about 7 O'clock, in a sub-terranean bar set with tables, chairs, flower-vases, and other decorations of taste, in the latest modern style.

There are caches and niches, around, for couples and for privacy.

The vast 'theatre' for dancing, in the centre of the bar, is lying empty, and meaningless, under the calm of red-dim light hanging like a pall over the customers, attendants and Barman (who is standing) — everybody, in his or her place, sitting dull.

The silence of the 'under-world' is becoming oppressing, except for two drunkards in a corner who, rather 'obliviously' merrily, are engaged in a tete-a-tete — drinking and chatting.

FIRST DRUNKARD

Two more.

*Again, as if the waiter in
attendance had not heard him*

Two more.

SECOND DRUNKARD

What did you say ? And what had Ben Jonson's
good soul said to it ?

FIRST DRUNKARD

Drink to me with —

SECOND DRUNKARD

Snapping-in glumly

Women, always women ! Always talking of women ;
and nothing else ! Nothing else. Ugh ! Or, could
you not ?

*The waiter bringing in two glasses
is seen on way towards them*

FIRST DRUNKARD

O, hang Ben's line,
and hang his pledges, I swear ;
and come — come drink from this !

*'Mid which Prelude a youngman
upbuoyed bursts*

THE YOUNGMAN

How wonderful !
How wonderful's Prime — the time that youth decoys
all untamed strains of Joy — and unalloyed —
to one's heart's-strings !
My world with echoes rings !

What's Life ? —
but a temple of Beauty — trimmed, re-touched, in-formed
by Art, by Passions' sweat and tears adorned :
— where Youth adores
his Icons — fondly set, un-set, re-set — e'ermore !

Come, Saki, come.

Come, fill my cup, instill

my being —

with lees of whispers' softness passed between

those lovers 'neath those shades of Vine E'ergreen !

And Virtue ? —

of man's own weakness born as 'tis ; well —

why should man vice, caroling, scorn ?

'Husband, my husband !'

— from somewhere Off-Stage.

YOUNGMAN

Roused from his reverie

'Cursed she ! Who showed her hither ?

Enter, as expected,

a girl — haggard, and woe-begone.

YOUNGMAN

You, here too ? Get 'ee gone ! Go 'way !

THE GIRL

But, —

YOUNG MAN

Would you, *or not* ?

Would you leave me, or would you not ?

GIRL

But, why ? Yes, I pray, why ?

What have I done ?

Or : is it — wine has wooed you more,
and from me off, . . .

— with lipsome arts kissed clean
of all of human touch was left in you
— of tenderness for me ?

YOUNG MAN

I say, begone !

GIRL

If that *could* please my lord !

But, God, why should it please
one — when one sees another in agonies torn ?
It passes me — how Man,
once sucking clean — of all its fragrance, essence; life —
could cast the bud, at-bloom, to roads — aside !
Wherefore not, *Picker*, as a becoming grace,
should pick it back, and pin it to his button's-hole
(yes, scentless though)
— as a memory for to keep — why not ?

YOUNGMAN

Seducer mine,
Now pay your wages due for *your* own game : Away ! —
Or — should I fresh recall
old tales my grandma told
of — how *your mother*, Eve, from Paradise brought
my father out,
you misbegot — ?

GIRL

God be my witness.

And God have mercy on me.

*She faints. An attendant hurriedly
comes, and puts her on a
divan.*

THE ATTENDANT

Have pity on her, master.

YOUNGMAN

Mind your business.

Have done with your preachings. And with your soft
concerns.

Leave me lone. And leave *her* lone. Go away.

Enter

an oldman a very shabbily dressed

THE OLDMAN

Alms for a poor old man.

For a helpless sick man, alms ..

An attendant chases him, shouting

THE ATTENDANT

Get out of here, you hoaried, unkempt, Hog!

*The oldman makes good his escape the
way he'd come.*

On-Stage

appears Lora, the bar-maid.

VOICES

One after another, gradually warming up,

breezed

Hey, Lora ! My love !

By God ! How lovely !

How sweet !

YOUNGMAN

*Feeling a touch of 'the new
awakening'*

Lora ?

Sweetheart ! How timely come !

O come, my Lora, come —

With a healing melody come, and singing dress
my wounds, fresh-oped, that *now* me sore distress.

LORA

Bar-maid's Song

'Tis — Spring in swing,

And Love on wings, . .

Who's there would sink -- a lifeless string ?

Sleep's — dreamless — away

Shall *yours* be day-

and-night. Why sleep when Nights are gay ?

Rise. Up ! This bliss,

O, who would miss :

Soft, stirring, urge — of lips-at-kiss ?

Hark : Spring's in swing,

And Love bewinged, . .

Heart, quick, come out — let's have a fling !

VOICES

Charming !

Lovelier than the loveliest — e'er heard or seen !

Long live our Lora !

Long live ! Long live !

YOUNGMAN

Then, friends —

To Lora's health and voice let's drink :

In glasses charged, come, let's our sorrows sink !

*Attendants are busy helping
customers*

O Beauty's marvellous mystic purge !

THE BARMAN

This wine,

(should my honoured patrons look it, give me ear),

this wine —

o'er years and years conceived, processed, . . .

a Bride e'er-young — ne'er seen

in Haroon's Courts, in the *havens* of Omar Khay'am !

Excellencies, taste — *just taste* !

YOUNG MAN

Tasting

This numbness in my throat
— best judge of tastes — I fear, it fails
to appreciate your tasteless 'cry of wares' !

*One of the attendants, engrossed
in serving the customers so long,
for the first time, now, happens
to eye the lady lying unconscious
on the divan — by everyone
neglected, unnoticed . . .*

THE ATTENDANT

My, —

Whate'er might have happened to this ?

— to my young lady ?

What's wrong with her ?

And they are revelling ! God forgive !

YOUNGMAN

He has a guilty, sensitive, ear

In love, struck dead, she is.

God bless !

And her beloved — too, haps you can see —
is probably me. You know —

*Perturbing sounds of thunder and
storm outside*

Hark —

Volcanoes, 'quakes or worse, in 'Ruption's throes !

But, we'll sit calm, and drink

— e'en should this earth grim quake on Death's dread
brink

or — Dawn to hell, Destruction's worst, should wake —
we'll drink and dance and sing, and merrier make !

*Enter a merchant, his looks hazy,
glazed, and his coat a-dripping
with rain. Puts that off and
approaches the bar*

BARMAN

Most welcome, Sir !

An attendant, with the promptitude of his office, arranging a chair behind the merchant

THE MERCHANT

Sitting

This dead-weight — Life —
how heavy it hangs on shoulders sagging weak !
Like wolves we strive —
ne'er knowing what the meat-we-snatch was for !
On rusting hinges 'on and on' we creak — purblind . . .

Enter another merchant

...Here comes my Rival, cut-throat sworn — as you can see
The Vulture — who for wine would quaff my blood !

BARMAN

*To the second merchant, offering him
a glass*

Most welcome, Sir !

FIRST MERCHANT

Tearing to a jeer

Mo-st well-come, s-irr !

A curse to think that what youf see afore —
this biped thing — indeed was one of us : a man !

SECOND MERCHANT

You coward !

Always bullying on-the-back ! You skunk !

FIRST MERCHANT

No more. Well, come on then —
and we will *right here* see
which one of us the more un-man he was.

SECOND MERCHANT

. Not I the one to show the back. Have *this* —

They indeed clash and come to blows.

But, are sooner separated by two others.

BARMAN

piteously

Friends, help me ; each of you, come help — me
stop these gentlefolk from ways of street.

My bar, you know, was not for broils or fists e'er meant.

'Tis yours, Excellencies' — *your own* — Bar !

YOUNGMAN

But, how else then, my friend,
should e'er we know — whose brawn and build was
stronger
— of the couple of 'friends'-at-blows ?

BARMAN

To the merchants

My lords,

In *this* moment of happiness, please,
forget you — each *his* personal woes,
and differences. ...

Come, take *here* —

Offering them Lora's cup

O, sip from *Lora's* lips, shake hands — befriend !

*Heavy broadside of a whiz through
the door left open upstairs*

BARMAN

To a boy

And — you *there*, run up, and close the door.

*After a fraction of a moment's pause,
again*

I say, don't you hear ?

You do not hear — my call or the Roar-of-heavens ?

Go. Bolt 'ee up, and slam 'em tight. Understand ?

Louder thunders. The boy, addressed,

rushing upstairs on-mission. The

old beggar is heard, Off-Stage, again :

'No charitable heart, left here, my God,

to feel for me in the world ?

And my pious self dying here

— of cold and hunger ! .. !'

THE ATTENDANT

You lump, befossiled, you still here ! ... ?

Gives a spirited chase.

Meanwhile — enter a priest. A

dignified, long, and stately beard.

But, evidently, is insane. To prove

which has if : one heavy hand

he thumps on the attendant and

the other on the beggar.

ATTENDANT

To sense, reflex-action

What fell ?

Seeing

Ugh ! But, don't you know —
in whose employ I am — ?

THE PRIEST

It hurts my finer sense, my boys, to see

And they are coming down

to see — such boors as you

here drink, and slouch about, . . .

— Drunken louts ! —

In swamps of sin and ignorance deep-down soaked —

'tis time ye woke.

From you, and such as you — your stuff,

God's prophets shrink ;
From you — your stuff, reformers blink —
to see your shameless smirching, smutty, feet
here trampling *all* —
should man in senses uphold — high, unstained :
Truth and Virtue, Decent mode of life,
that sustain earth and sky — in one 'closed'
 merry-go-round —
ye morbid crush beneath your loathsome feet — all that !

No thunder's this — the rumbling sound you hear.
'Tis God's own Wrath (released on world at last). *O, fear !*
No retreat now. No penitence' tear. No hope,
'Too late — the hour is past ; no Gates shal' ope. Yet —
God, in His Mercy, lo, outpours
— from His fulsome, *outstretched*, hands and arms —
for us these Seas — to wash off all
of Sin and Mud on earth whate'er there is !

*All are awed, stricken, except the
youngman*

YOUNG MAN

In a bar — the revellers', merry men's, booth,
O priest, to teach your filthy pseudo-truths !
Bah, whom you mean to cheat ?

PRIEST

Or, is it — God,
these erring ones — have strayed too far
from Reclamation's bounds, for us, for all —
their homes, their friends, their sleeping souls :
poor things — in minds not sound — ?

*Outside, somewhere a bolt has
crashed. Inside, it was deafening
already. And it is crashing —
every moment heavier. With a
cutting-in fall of crashes in quick
succession comes a Blast and —
an attendant, apparently the one
who's failed in the mission he was
sent on.*

THE ATTENDANT

Good lord ! —

A CUSTOMER

Inexplicably shocked ; interrupting

What's the matter ?

ATTENDANT

My lords, the Earth has oped her jaws,
from which are swallowing Occans gushing — Swish !

Closes his eyes

CUSTOMER

Frightened to the core

Is it ? — But, is it true, my boy, even as you say ?
Or — a creation of your own affrighted nerves you've
seen ?

ATTENDANT

'Tis true. Truer than any words or fear could tell.
A poor unlettered boy, me, speech oft fails.

Closes his eyes again

PRIEST

Deluge —

sure — God's own Floods !

At last hath come the long-due holy Word

— to prove Clairvoyance — that truth of Testament.

Thank God — that vice shall no more be ;

Thank God — no sin, or sinner, more ye'll see

— Save as a tale that ruins of earth shall tell

To Angels — how it blessed the poor Abel

— By freeing him aye from Cain's dread wiles.

Friends, thus doth God Earth's weight of sins consign

To Book of Debts — by Floods off-writ of all Its signs !

Compassionate striking Hand -

*Rest of the holy man's sermon is
drowned in the woeful con-
fusion of thunder and storm. A
sudden rumbling Flash then wipes
out everything — there's complete
Dark, and Silence.*

*'Candles ! Candles ! Somebody go
and bring candles from the cup-
board !' — Barman's voice. A
scampering of feet. Somebody
strikes a match. But the dim glow-
worms of the candles only suffice
to expose, Fear looming on every
other face.*

FIRST DRUNKARD

'Seeing the lights' aglow

What's going on there ?

Hey, waiter !

Two more.

*But, ruminating — when the waiter
is gone*

There's beauty, queer beauty —

'n Darkness — all her own :

for once — one sees one's own self — glimpsed or whole —
alone !

SECOND DRUNKARD

How strange ! God's wonder —

First thing of sense e'er heard from you, by life !

I'm blest ;

Ne'er had one its like from Friend's lips before.

*Instead of 'two more' the waiter
has brought in a bottle, and starts
uncorking it.*

ONE OF THE ATTENDANTS

*A voice becoming the candles, solemn
and subdued*

But, Father,
Is there no way out ?
— No way out-of-this ?

PRIEST

God's Will
who can revoke ?

ATTENDANT

Father,
Father in heaven and earth —
To die so soon, so sudden —
Just, just to be gone !

PRIEST

'Tis God's unchanging Will —
His firm Resolve : to end our miseries thus.
Our stars, off orbits, can't absolve
Our selves or bodies from what is our due.

To the boy standing near him

My son, go up, unbolt the door.

ATTENDANT

Please, Father, please !
Pray give us chance to cleanse our slates
with penitence' tears, —
our souls with holy thoughts contrite. Please wait !
Please, Father : wait.

PRIEST

Cowards !
In death at least *could* one be dignified
— for once — to die as brave men die !

ATTENDANT

But, we have sinned. Father,
Will God forgive what we unknowing did ?

PRIEST

Pray !
Come, my children, pray !
Come, all of us, as one, on knees fall — pray —
for selves, our own — and not our own, *for all*
some good words say.
Of conscience light, then, let's face death
with faces happy, bright.
Or — Hell *must* sooner ope
its mouths
— e'er hungering for its faggots, e'er on prowl !

ONE OF THE CUSTOMERS

Alas — to die,
to die and bid farewell for good
to everything one might cherish —
to hopes, to words of promise, to dreams,
to songs — ah unfulfilled !

Breaks down and cries

YOUNG MAN

So, then —
Is this the end ? — an end to all sweet things :
to honeymoons planned, to projects launched,
to picnics, tender ideas, .. not yet gi'en
a foretaste — e'en a glimpse !

*Pricked to the core, can no more
express. The bar becomes a
spectacle of tears and cries.*

*All are on their legs — aimlessly
about. All — except the two
drunkards, who remain sitting
where they were, drinking heavily
and with the same unconcern.*

TEARFUL CRIES

My father !

Son !

My brother !

Sis !

My wife !

PRIEST

*Consoling and chiding in the
same breath*

— So Fate ordained ! There's *naught* amiss.

Rise, wipe these tears depraving man to dust, ..

— Give them to gods ; and meet Death with a smile —
you must !

FIRST MERCHANT

This solemn hour

it drowns all earthly strifes :

Come, friend, here's *this* for you —

Extending his hand

Come, shake my hand, forgive !

Let by-gones buried lie — before we die.

SECOND MERCHANT

Forgive me, brother. Give me your hand.

These few moments left of life . . .

Let's part as friends.

They even embrace each other

PRIEST

Come,

My sons, come let's forget

our pasts, our sins, our old regrets ;

And what of breath remains — unfearing — unto God

all let us give, unstained —

in a solemn, prayerful, strain.

THE GIRL

*Waking, and straining to gauge
everything around*

Where am I ?

YOUNGMAN

Rushing towards her in a flow

Sweetheart ! .. ? — 'Tis *me*, .. Darling: *me* ---
your lover — see ! I'm here on knees,...

I crave your grace !

He's weepy

GIRL

You graceless !

As if stung

Get 'ee gone. Go 'way !

And don't you show me your face again !

YOUNGMAN

My love, my cherished, my soul, my life, .. !

GIRL

Cutting

Not wife !

YOUNGMAN

Darling, bear with me.

My, pray for me — your man, once gone astray.

Your virgin's veil, forgiving tears, may save
me yet from a wretched, terrible, grave.

They say, in God's eyes, broken hearts
have power that angels moves.

I beg, commend me unto God !

Or, I 'm doomed !

*He's cut short — choked in throat
and solicitous in vision.*

GIRL

Stands puzzled

God, where am I ? — Is this a dream I see ?

Or, are these spectres from a nightmare gleam
and haunt and — lingering agonise me ?

Opens her eyes wider to make sure

Or : say — what just you're saying.

Repeat, and I will hear — sweet words — again !

Such words — they still exist ! . . ?

YOUNGMAN

My wife,
O, crush me not with a listless, unbelieving, ear.
'Tis too much, too much, for me *too much* !

Breaks down

GIRL

Said you — I was a seducer ?

YOUNGMAN

Was drunk when did, my dear.
Then I was off my sense : was not my self.
I plead ; forgive.
If Purity e'er could take a form on earth, ---
c'est toi mon amour !

Sobs

GIRL

Moved

O Love, O Love,
that these sweet, soft, warm words do still exist :
I'd quite forgot !
How long it is I hear them once again ?

*Unable to stand the ecstasy, drops
into his arms*

YOUNGMAN

O *pain* divine, that in *her* torments her,
O, let me have it whole from her — to stir,
and stab, me back to life !

THE PRIEST

The end is come — for world —
The dead they yawn,
And those alive are, here, about to part !

A CUSTOMER

Whatever meant he — this godly man ?

PRIEST

The Sun hath reached the peak ;
No shadows shall the objects cast : no more !
On brink of a New Age struggling free,
What visions — imagined ne'er nor dreamed — there be !

Thunder

Oh, nearer, nearer e'er, comes — hear ? — Death's holy
Call !
Death's hour *is* come.

GIRL

'Tis Life's, not Death's :
How sweet to feel — together, after all,
together and side by side,
together to e'er abide —
with love : earth's happiest bride !

YOUNGMAN

This holiest Dew,
O, let me from thine eyes drink in ;
So, let it soothe my torments, cleanse my soul,...
e'en so me dying console !

*Embracing, but sooner by thunder
sundered.*

PRIEST

But a few moments more, my sons.
Now make ye ready to pray.

ALL

Yes, Father, we will pray.
Ours but to pray.

PRIEST

Offering the Prayer

Lord God,
these children of sloth and sin,
they 're on their march,
from wilderness freed,
their feet to bleeding pricked — through Ignorance' thicks
To thy love, by Thy Grace, am I leading them.

Great been our wrongs.
But, greater far Thy Mercy's there to soothe
our penitent hearts.

God, shower Thy Grace on our Dark-sealed eyes
to ope their lids to Light Divine.
To New Dawn's stirs, God, touch our hearts,
to Whispers New our ears.
God, give us strength
to stand at Thy graced feet
to lay down humbly
Penitence' buds and flow'rs.

Amen.

ALL

Amen.

Absolute silence.

FIRST DRUNKARD

*Seeing that weird file of men and
women and hearing that droll drone
of 'Amens'*

Hey, what's going on there ?

SECOND DRUNKARD

Without giving the least thought to it

Resurrection —

The Day of Resurrection : of

'Come, ye sheep — O gone astray,

come hither.' — *That is come !*

*Falls into a fit of wild, hilarious,
uproarious laughter.*

FIRST DRUNKARD

Resurrection ! Is it —
is it, truly, come — ?
Oh, what relief : that Word of old fulfilled —
All Holy Books, unfailing, promise wine
— yes, wine, *for all* : Wine !
O Happiness ! Hooray !

SECOND DRUNKARD

Echoing thoughtlessly
Hooray !

THE PRIEST

Insane. Insane. They're mad.
*Absolute silence. Until Lora's
full-heart bursts*

LORA

And, Father,
what's my fate ? — What prospects me ?
I'm ready to meet your God — calm, face to face :
a prayer in heart, a curse on lips.
All memories of my innocence forgot,
I — who from every passing cloud e'er sought
a show'r : well, why they call me all of Stain ? . . .
But, have I sinned ? — I myself ask sometimes ;
If sin is it to be through Purgat'ry ?
.. And sinner *not* that heartless crushes buds ?
Is full again, and weeps

PRIEST

Don't weep. My child, don't weep
This earthly robe —
was meant for death, decay — why probe ?
It needs must go — what, if of patches full ?
The Cherished Gem beneath
is what *does* count, and not
the weight of dust enshrining, shrouding, *It*.
— Full many a woman all through life despised
to tomb was virgin gone — a spotless bride !
No taint e'er touches soul-of-things,

AN ATTENDANT

'Tis stifling. I cannot stand. I'd leave.

Nobody speaks.

A sneeze, like something sacriligious.

'MIXED' SHOCK

Who was it ?

*From somewhere behind the line of
hangers-for-wardrobe is heard a
rude, unsuppressed, cough —
followed in person by the appea-
rance of a hesitant head, popp-
ing : the beggar's*

PRIEST

O reverence —
in a fair beard's sombre flow a-weep !

THE OLDMAN

But, forgive my irreverence :
I'm hungry.

ATTENDANTS

Almost as one voice

O, come on, sire,
we are here brothers now.
Come here, Baba, and eat your fill,

*One of them runs, and brings for
the oldman a mixed full-plate*

OLDMAN

Mysterious are His Mercy's ways to act !
From where He sees,
and how fulfils our needs !

*How thankfully he looks at those
around him ! Then, passing his
unkempt hand over his wrinkled
head*

These trails of Time
on a sea or desert otherwise calm
record
what in my life I 've missed
or ne'er achieved !

Another has brought some eggs

PRIEST

Feeling that Time was fleeting

Now, charge —
My children, charge your glasses for Life's last toast
to Death.

ATTENDANTS

Pouring into glasses

This purest, pious, stuff
in these most precious cups —

BARMAN

*In spite of himself, to the
attendants, correcting*

This most damn'd stuff,
you wretches, you are pouring still ? Or —
won't you stop ?
Go, pour that into drains !
And bring from Cellar fresh
Good Age-old Wine
for dear friends, now.
Not this the time for frauds.
God won't forgive.
Friends, this your Cheat
now shamed before you stands,
and craves your pardon.
Forgive, and now accept
my penitence in *my* way, on Life's last day : —
by serving you the genuine thing.
I beg of friends : Forgive.

EVERYBODY

Moved, in a body

Oh, no, : forget,
And be of larger heart.
Come, with us drown — in drink —
that dark and shadowy past. Now. Come !

*While they hold the glasses, the Priest
is crooning*

PRIEST

Song of Death

O ship, yon ship, —
In tempests' eddying, drowning, grip,
Thy Pilot still
Shall bring thee 'shore, and safe : God Wills !

I hear them — hail
Ha'en — thy inmates. Not one that wails.
Their tears of Bliss
Down cheeks a-beam — oh how I wish to kiss !

*One of the attendants sobs,
very miserably*

BARMAN

What makes you cry, my child ? — Are you afraid
of the coming end ?

THE ATTENDANT

Crying still

Not that. No, not that, Boss !
Not such as me could Death e'er scare.
'Tis Conscience :
My master sowed the seeds
whereof the harvest he ne'er got for reap,
for — I, as a vigilant fox, always,
was swindling him
of what he gave or what he, stinging, ne'er us gave
— we thought we'd earned as wage or tip.
And now —
you ne'er can know
the weight that sinks me down
to lowliest, unretrieving depths

Again sobs

BARMAN

Patting gently on the back

Don't weep, don't weep, my son.

PRIEST

Temptation makes of all of us like one —
brings out our blacker sides —
and, bounden slaves, aye tethered by his 'cutting' ropes,
we march, in circles endless, .. and we fall, and rue !
We sin and sin and sin — all life !

A CUSTOMER

True.

We are sinners all — some more, some less.
Who'll forgive whom, .. who chide, deride ?

AN ATTENDANT

But, here I faint. 'Tis choking. Killing.

PRIEST

Go and open the door. Let fresh air in
and brace us, to a man, to manly die.

*The attendant runs up.
Profound silence, twice broken by
the Priest's mumble*

PRIEST

Lord, forgive them. Forgive all of them.
Forgive. Forgive.

*All heads bowed low. Solemnity
and breathlessness.*

*Sudden in-rush of a current — of
the accumulated water — brush-
ing past and reaching their feet —
that's all ! Suddenly again,
candle-lights turn garish, ghastly
e'en at night. ... Two scurry-
ing feet, a shouting voice*

ATTENDANT

My lords, I've seen —

ONE OF THE CUSTOMERS

But, why this scare ? — Have you seen a ghost ?

ANOTHER

Scared worse
What did he say ?

FIRST ONE

He says he has seen —

THE SECOND

Seen what ?

ATTENDANT

My lords, I've seen —
people walking — men and women and children —
walking — on the roads, in the streets, and
in broad lamps'-light !

ALL

Scarce believing

What ?

*Who should answer ? The hush
is symbolic — of the senses stopped
functioning, and then — coming
back to life again : 'That was
it !'. The youngman is the first
to voice and react*

YOUNGMAN

So, *this* is your Deluge !

How did you manage to escape from the Asylum, I say :
to come here and start lecturing to us on Death ?

I say, when did you *live* — to be able to speak of *death* ?

PRIEST

O God, My God !

YOUNGMAN

Back to life, my heart, to life :
to thrills and thirsts and itches — still unsatisfied !

To the priest

Had you not been dead *already*,
I'd have killed you, on the spot, you sod !

PRIEST

O God, O God !

MIXED REACTIONS

How beautiful's life !

What a nightmare !

The poetry of it !

Oh, ghastly !

*Hungry, blood-shot eyes, all, riveted
on the Priest*

PRIEST

Back to sin and error. How easy is the slip !

O Lord !

YOUNGMAN

Come, Lora, let us leave this den —

this hell — in *this* Demon's charge ! Let's leave !

*All start moving towards the
door*

BARMAN

Excellencies,

I pray Your Excellencies : pay me for your drinks,
please. Please, before you leave ;

I'm a poor man, you know. Excellencies !

*The youngman stops short, while
going towards Lora*

YOUNGMAN

Have this : I pay for all.

*Throwing at the Barman a bundle of
notes*

Come, Lora, —

Waiting. Then, arm-in-arm

Let's go.

*Both moving, like a duet, towards
the door*

THE GIRL

*Shocked, but coming to her own,
to herself repeating*

'My love, my cherished, my soul, my life, ... !

'My, pray for me,...

'Your virgin's veil, forgiving tears, may save
me yet,...

'If Purity e'er could take a form on earth,

C'est toi mon amour ! .. !'

*Distracted, not sobbing, leaves —
slowly, sadly, out*

THE MERCHANTS

*One dons again his coat, swaggers
a few hurried steps towards Exit,
but before leaving, rudely —
elbowing — bumps the other, and
with bloody eyes*

'Let bygones buried lie !' Ha, ha ! Hmm ! Well —
we'll see ; we'll see outside. 'Friends !'

*Laughs again, madly. The other
follows, swiftly too, 'on heels'.*

AN ATTENDANT

*Noticing the beggar still at the
table as if nothing had transpired*

**You filth, you still here ? As if your father owned us and
owned — our bar !**

*Kicks him, and chasing ...
The oldman puts on his hat, and
dragging his muddy feet ...*

THE OLDMAN

To himself repeating

**'O reverence, in a fair beard's flow a-weep ! ...
'Come, Sire, we are brothers, ... !' Hugh ! ...**

Exit

BARMAN

And you wretch :

**'My master sowed the seeds,
whereof the harvest he ne'er got for reap !'**

**So : that was the way you should have responded
to my generosity ?**

Vigilant fox !

ATTENDANT

Very submissive

But, you've forgiven, Boss !

I crave indulgencee.

Crouching

BARMAN

Ired

Get out !

The boy, terrified, 'backs out'

I don't want cheats to *look after* me.

Poor boy he stumbles on something

Get out of here ! — I say.

Last to leave — after the pandemonium cleared ! — are the Two Drunkards : each 'obliging' the other to 'resurrect' him — by leaning heavily on his companion — staggering and reeling as they leave, the least untouched by what had gone on or around, in the world, all this while. 'Two more !', 'No more !', and they have left.

Left alone, the Barman eyes the Priest — meaningly.

THE PRIEST

Monstrously sane, and on way out

My God, My God,
This earth of thine
For a Deluge waits. Come, Grace Divine !

Curtain

L I G H T

Light strains my eyes

— bedazzling sights, and dreams' soft sprites away !

I moan, I sigh,

She hits, derides — my Calm serene, in sway

Reducing Life

to glances wide — of wounded hopes', a prey's !

Light bleeds my eyes

— delusions stride uncurbed : alack-a-day !

To visionscapes new

oft — becked to rue, though reap, all joys of May —

With wearied feet

I follow 'er meek — unbalmed, when fall or stray !

Light blinds my eyes

— ah, woe betide ! .. Shed, kindly Dark, a ray !

Have pity, Light,

— ye'll crush me right — my puny base ; O, stay —

It still doth cleave

to 'ts wish to live : O, spare its foible, pray !

THE TEMPLE

To Dr Ali Naser

'Tis an experience
(a soothing, touching, one to boot) —
when reverence brings one back
to one's own Temple of memories cherished-mute.
For, then one feels —
was something gone amiss *somewhere* ; —
No more's about
that ancient Awe, that Chant, that Grace to spare,
Nor that Majesty — all that pristine vein —
no more's around.
... *An age seems past.*

'How long, how long, my Lord,
my altar hath in stark oblivion lain ?'

..

In some such strain
— I felt a mystic pain once :
when, by Loneless reaved, I paced along
— in mine own thoughts immersed -
when, *whence* who knows ?
— From here, from there,
from everywhere — in through Nostalgia's vents —
did Phantoms rush, and merge,
in on me — in their swarms —
to hover, and hound me in *one* whelming surge !
I heard my name — by Love in soft tones urged ; *but, no --*
'Not me ; sure — someone else must have been meant.'

..

I paced along
My memories stirred - - -
(I lull them back to sleep) ,
... In darkness for my old retreat a-creep,
... and there my candle lit, a wee bit flurred —
I broke in sobs, and heard — in the silence —
mine own tears.

U G A R I T

*A newly-discovered city in Syria, older than
Mohen-jo-daro, where archaeologists have
come across the first alphabet in the world.*

A MARVEL —

from the depths of Past emerged,

Undoing Destiny's clamps, defying Death, ..

Still fresh, mysterious, graced, an hallowed urge,

— To Time's bewilderment, O thou !

Is it ? — that sickened of immortal life,

Thy dreams serene thou didst

give up for joys of Strife,

And so —

Art, once more, in our midst !

Come, greet, re-own

thy home, thy land, thy people — Lone

by them (by spectres dull) albeit

disowned.

Knowest thou ? —

How oft did Time, and raiders, Pharaohs, join

Their horses, swords, and spears — to thee purloin —

In one invective, malice, greedy hash,...

...How on thy fanes, thy shrines, rapacious dashed

— The while thou sleptst in-shut

In Glory's undisturbed, peaceful hut !

— Knowest thou ?

... ..

Thou dost not smile to be back here ? — ah me !
Sure — gashes in the Homeland's breast touch thee
With anguish, storm, and fire — to quick, and sore :
Thine eye — a prick, a restless Pain — doth roam
-- A tender Sprite that nowhere finds a home !

... ..

Whence, who, am I — thou ask ?
Well : —
“Glory's Child,
In trance of moth's Death-Dance — akin to thee —
A relic-twin of Glory's, too, am I
— A remnant-shred of a pulsing Spout that did
Its blessings — all world o'er, and yond — show'r, waft —
— Like dew and rain, and breeze and shine — fresh, sweet —
O'er hills and fields, and nests and crevices — neat !

... ..

— A tale, by Stars heard, whispered ear-to ear,
My land hath been.

“How oft from lingering, hovering, aroma’s breath
This nation Prime and Spring restored to Death !

“But —

Suffering all dismembered homes’ hard lots

(A cradle cruel of bleeding Tyrant’s this.

this world, as ’tis) — thy home

No use re-telling all that to thy face

(Of unshed sobs of an orphan’s ah a trace !) ;

Pray —

Back to thy Bed, lest

more thou list to only more regret.”

TABLEAUX



“Veena”

To the unheard Song of M.S. Subbulakshmi

Her eyes in-drawn,
Her fingers lost — on shattered strings,
And here I sleep — *here* by her side !

In winged waves
Her soul o'erflown : was thus she breathed
Her last and — spiriting fled ?

On a tune ne'er-heard
Of Malkauns' lull — did I there merge
In Dream's joy-ride ?

*

Then —
Dawn soft-sighed
My 'lids : to bloom — *at her* *at strains*
Of Bhair'vi — from afar *from her* ?
How shall I know, decide ?



"O Beauty, Petrify !"

Yon statue there
(O my lovely fair)
All of marble hued —
Rose up, and viewed
Mockingly, perverse,
This universe ;

Then boldly strode
Century over century
To the shrined abode
Of immortality !

Naked, proud :
Loveliness is bowed
Before her naked pride
— Beautified
In the eternal spring
Of youth.

So, wondering,
As in a dream, we turn
Our gaze ; yet yearn —
Gazing anew, and still
Her charm masters the will !

The sculptor thus
Chiselled her ; beauteous
— Symbol of Beauty; then —
Passed from mortal ken ;
.. .. She (that he dreamed upon)
Unageing, changeless, liveth on !

My lovely fair !
Too harsh are they to bear —
Time's accidents : I fear
Too soon — too near —
All my dreams may die :
Thou changing, I
Waking and — alone

O beauty
turn to stone !

(A. J. Arberry's version)



"A Folktale of the Snowscapes"

Cchandogya's tale of Uma Haimavati,
 to all appearances,
 is about an Himalayan girl
 at the crossroads of Prime — whom
 neither Agni nor Vayu nor Indra
 could win over for his bed
 — having failed completely
 'to burn or blow or bend'
 a straw in her presence
 — in fulfilment of a stipulation by her proposed.

In truth, however, (i. e., in Nature),
 it is just one way of expressing
 the natives' pagan vision or observation
 that —

over the 'Peak of Parvati', alias Everest,
 never never hath a fire raged,
 never a storm blown down as much as a straw,
 never never an (Aryan ?) Invader dared across.

‘ India Discovered ’

A writer true
of a Book of Life
from which
— retouched, inspired — from page to page —
generations still-to-come
shall all derive
new strength, new light, new strife
in times of stress and gloom !

THIS WAY

'FREE soar, my Word !'

I step aside — and smile.

Why should I care —

What stares it leaves, what riles — ?

Full many a Mountain

— Crawlers on his feet,

On a twinkling Star

His blooming, purple cheek —

To the world was lost.

FINAL TOUCHES

an operette

An artist's attic : main part whereof is his studio — simple, rather shabbily furnished. Portraits lying about everywhere.

An extemporized door, on one side, leading to the bedroom.

Facing an unfinished picture of a woman's, the artist, Fuad, contemplating it.

After a while he moves towards the window, opens it, and looks into space.

FUAD

O B e a u t y,
hem thy lids and hem me in and — dream :
And lead me on
through thy realms, there, unknown
till, lost, I'm part of thee, thy being — thine own !

Towards bed-room

Suad, wake up :
Let dreams depart from your warm bed ; come —
Come, from your opening eyes
let Day break, rise !

Enter Suad, in her night-gown

SUAD

F u a d !
Fuad, where did you reach ?

Looking at the picture, intently.

FUAD

These poor, inefficient hands !

*Downhearted, turns his head
away from the canvas*

SUAD

Soothingly

Fuad, d a r l i n g !

FUAD

Revved

Blessed be these lips
that pour Eternity for my ears to sip !

And he kisses her

SUAD

You kiss me ? —

Hath morning brought you whisps of eve
— up-borne on breeze ?

FUAD

How the wounded drink !

*Leads her to the window. And
they look together at the panorama
of detached villas, orchards,
ranches, lakes,*

SUAD

Is there happiness there too ?

And then, the woman in her returning,

FUAD

Would you like to live there ?

.. Such charm, my love,
is worthy of an home in Blue.

SUAD

You've gone too far — —

FUAD

Why, yes : wherever you be —

*Interruption,
by a knock at the door*

SUAD

You heard it ?

FUAD

Yes. But, who could it be ?

Interruption again.

Fuad goes and opens the door.

Enter Nizar.

FUAD

Nizar ?

NIZAR

Yes, my old friend. And, Suad !

FUAD

Lovingly looking at Suad

Time after all repented, dear friend.

NIZAR

May your life ever be — as looks —
a wistful smile at traces left behind !

Suad leaves in consternation.

FUAD

With a point

And you, Nizar, —
No date with Life ?
And — why this long absence ?
Was it forgetting friends ?

NIZAR

I ne'er remember, for — ne'er forget,
Forgetfulness — feeds only Death.

FUAD

And you — *live* ?

NIZAR

In emptiness.
And in this emptiness —
the Unforgettable grows with us ;
and makes our plunging into the Dark so smoothe !

FUAD

You are in love then ! ... ?

NIZAR

Above love,
My Fire — it needs no fuel.

Happens to look at the picture

And what do you do *there* ?

FUAD

I paint her.

NIZAR

Paint her — ?
She's near you, *within* you. — I ?
Is this your end, then ?

FUAD

I'm finished, I think.

NIZAR

Not you ; the Fire you feed.
O Deprivation's end !

Contemplating the picture

Not in her eyes the secrets of your soul ;
Nor on her cheeks the passions of your Sense.

FUAD

I'm lost —

NIZAR

You are no more thirsty !

You are no more *hungry*. That's all.

*Something 'unforgettable'
coming up from memory*

Where's Laila ?

Looks around, searchingly

Your immortal piece — ? I do not see her.

Was here — on this wall, I remember.

Again looking around

Oh : there I suppose — in that corner :

the one that's veiled. Sure, that is it.

There !

FUAD

Yes, there.

*Nizar moves towards it, and then—
suddenly turning towards his friend*

NIZAR

Escape from yourself ?

Laila never posed — nor smiled — for you ;

You really loved her.

*Moves again towards the corner,
and lifting the veil*

B e y o n d admiration !

SUAD

Let me lone, Nizar. Please go away.

I know I'm forging Truth.

Even so — I'm happy.

*Enter Suad, with two cups
on a tray.*

*Nizar looks at her with ecstasy,
eyeing particularly the torn edge
of her garment.*

*They take cups from the tray.
Nizar's eyes transfixed at the
hem.*

NIZAR

Thank you, Fuad.

Eyes unmoving, still.

FUAD

Moved

If but the threads of Dawn could themselves weave !

SUAD

You put me out.

She's left.

FUAD

S u a d !

NIZAR

A tune — not a word, not a name !

I should leave you now.

And he leaves.

*Left alone, and glancing at
the picture*

'Above admiration !' — 'tis true. I hate it :

Reminder of my climax !

*Steps towards it ; wraps it up ;
addressing towards the door*

Suad, I'm leaving with Nizar.

A VOICE

*Receding, but caressing,
from behind the door*

God bless you, Fuad.

*Re-enter Suad, but, finding
nobody in the room, yields to Memory*

SUAD

He came back.

I know he loved me.

Loves me still ?

He's *closed* — a bit I do not undersrand.

A delicate breeze yet a crushing gale
that won't be tamed.

Adrift with recollections

'A tear is *the* precious gift from God —
a gift, I never enjoyed.' — He'd told me once.

'My roots are deep in earth ;
I'm a silent, wandering, Pain.' — Still another time.

Just *closed* — a bit I do not understand.
Why came he back ?

... ..

When bidding farewell long ago he'd said :
'Learn how to touch your wound and smile !' — And 'ad
smiling left !

Re-enter Nizar

SUAD

Nizar — ?

NIZAR

The living dead.

SUAD

A little unnerved

But, what's you want ?

NIZAR

To live a while.

The ship in the harbour is waiting ;

No freight she takes.

SUAD

Confused

Come down to earth, and speak.

I don't understand.

NIZAR

I do not understand myself.

Fumbling

I've brought you this —

Taking out a ring

This diamond's all what now I have
of *your* earth left on me.

SUAD

He still loves me — ?

To herself.

NIZAR

Visioning

Above love.

SUAD

Touched

Come down, and speak.

I don't understand.

NIZAR

Never missed you : you were everywhere !

SUAD

And Fuad ?

Perplexed.

NIZAR

His is the flower ; mine the scent.

Good bye. The ship in the harbour is waiting

And he's leaving

SUAD

Aghast

Nizar !

Then unconsciously

If so ; a parting kiss — ?

NIZAR

Returning

Yes : and never to meet again.

At kiss.

Enter Fuad. With a parcel.

FUAD

A bitter smile

'The arrow has left.

SUAD

Fuad — ?

NIZAR

Fuad — ?

FUAD

Ne'er saw before a dance in a funeral.

Nizar makes to leave.

FUAD

Why hurry ? — bored ?

Where's the harm —

if a friend drank from his friend's cup — ?

Suad leaves, nonplussed.

*Fuad throws aside the parcel,
with a frightening unconcern.*

NIZAR

Rising to the occasion

Friend,

I had never meant —

to bring you back to your lost horizons. Anyway,

So turns it : well —

This is my contribution to your Immortality !

Good bye.

And he's left.

Fuad, noticing the ring, takes it up ;

Scrutinizing and putting it on a finger,

FUAD

Staring at the ring

Cheap price —

this ring, these rays

— all phantoms of Lust here entwined dance !

No : but bleeding lips are these —

a prey, a hungry wolf

Apostrophe to the Ring

O Fang asleep,
Come, wake up, sting —
Thy venom transfuse,
And in me here abide —
Till Death at last us part.

Incurable might incurable cure !

Suad !

Suad : *not hearing me ?*

Enter Suad, or Agony a-move

FUAD

You cry — ?

O, no : waste not these pearls of Beauty's pride.

She totters

Up : guard them. Up ;

These charming eyes at hea'ens must always look !

SUAD

Fuad, just listen —

FUAD

To you — ? But, why ? —

You've nothing done.

SUAD

I beg, pray listen —

FUAD

But, why ? — for pity ?

No shaft to love *more killing* e'er could be,

Stand up, preserve the pride —

of your charm, .. of our love .. !

SUAD

You are cruel, Fuad !

Breaks down

FUAD

Forget it ; come —

Be a woman, and brave. Look here —

My, what have I brought — for you !

*Unpacks the parcel, and
taking out the silken robe*

Look —

My love, if the threads of Dawn
could themselves weave ! ... ?

SUAD

Hurt, the more

Fuad, —

FUAD

I've sold the most precious treasure I 'd had

—to see you smile. Smile : 'tis yours !

*Then, playing with the ring . . . ;
and Suad sees it, shocked*

SUAD

My God !

FUAD

Picking up the Robe

My sweat, my tears, my sleepless nights, !

SUAD

A rending scream

O : No ! - - -

*Covers her face in her palms ;
and then, next fraction of the
moment, rushes to the Window.
The room instead is filled with
a mad laughter : Fuad, oblivious
altogether, looks for his brush
and pelette, finds them, and —
going to the easel — resumes
from an unfinished point.*

Curtain

O COOINGS SOFT, O KOEL

To Chamupati

(1893-1937)

in his own words re-produced

O cooings soft —

O koel, immerse

My torments in thy wails :

O wordless Pain

In *pancham* strain

E'er hovering o'er hills, dales !

Or — these pricks thine

And this calm mine

Do both enshrine one Pain ?

IN PRESS

THE TAJ

a play in verse

&

KHAJURAH O

an epic